

LSI 03-2373

PATENT

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION FOR PATENT

ON

A SAFE METHOD FOR UPGRADING FIRMWARE OF OPTICAL DISK PRODUCT

BY

KARL LU
WORLD TRADE TOWER, ROOM 2602
500 GUANG DONG ROAD
SHANGHAI 200001, P.R. CHINA
CITIZEN OF CHINA

CERTIFICATE OF MAILING BY "EXPRESS MAIL"

"Express Mail" Mailing Label Number: EV 380 207 605 US

Date of Deposit: February 4, 2004

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under 37 C.F.R. § 1.10 on the date indicated above and is addressed to Mail Stop Patent Application, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria VA 22313-1450.

BY:

ReNea D. Berggren
ReNea D. Berggren

A SAFE METHOD FOR UPGRADING FIRMWARE OF OPTICAL DISK PRODUCT

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119 to United States Provisional Application Serial Number 60/531,277 filed December 18, 2003. Said United States Provisional Application 60/531,277 is hereby incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention generally relates to the field of electronic product with an optical disk drive, and more particularly to a method for upgrading a firmware of it.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Optical disk drives, in particular the category of Digital Versatile Disk (DVD) drives and Compact Disk (CD) drives, are widely employed in consumer electronic products such as DVD players and recorders. This kind of product has a firmware code memory device and a controller that executes the firmware code. With the firmware code, the optical disk drive can read data files stored on the Compact Disk Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) or DVD, write data files on the CD-ROM or DVD, and playback music CD, video DVD or music DVD. This firmware code is usually stored in non-volatile semiconductor memory devices, such as the erasable-programmable read-only memory (EPROM) or electrically erasable-programmable read-only memory (EEPROM).

[0004] Often, the firmware code of these products may be modified to correct program problems (program bugs) and provide additional functionality (improvements).

[0005] Conventional solutions to modifying the firmware code of these products have involved replacement of the firmware code stored in the semiconductor memory device with a new firmware code. If the semiconductor memory used for storing the firmware code is a device like an EPROM, it must be removed from its inserted socket or desoldered from the printed circuit board so as to implement reprogramming of its memory content.

[0006] If the semiconductor memory used for storing the firmware code is a device like an EEPROM, the firmware can be modified (rewritten) by executing an upgraded firmware code. Many manufacturers now provide optical disks storing upgraded firmware code for end users. The end users may insert the optical disk to the disk drive to execute the upgraded firmware code stored in the optical disk. As a result, the firmware code stored in the semiconductor of the product may be replaced with the upgraded firmware code.

[0007] However, the above described conventional solution which allows the end user to upgrade the firmware may create serious problems. Conventionally, the application ware which rewrites the firmware upon upgrading command is compressed and stored in EEPROM, together with the other programming code for the optical disk device. Therefore the firmware image can be rewritten only after the whole firmware is erased. However, if an abnormality occurs during the rewriting procedure, the EEPROM may be wiped out (no firmware code) or the EEPROM may store a corrupted firmware code.

[0008] As such, the conventional solutions to upgrading the firmware associated with the optical disk drive may render the whole product inoperable especially when the upgrading was terminated by unexpected event such as power failure, invalid application ware, disk read error and the like. Consequently, an improved method for safe way to upgrade firmware without rendering the device inoperable is necessary.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] Accordingly, the present invention provides a safe method for upgrading firmware code using disk drives without corrupting firmware even if an abnormality occurs during a upgrading a firmware process. In an embodiment of the invention, the invention may provide a safe method for upgrading the firmware code of an optical disk product (DVD player or recorder) by employing an optical disk product which comprises a nonvolatile memory device for storing a firmware code with a boot system image (a first program) and an application ware image (a second program) separately. In an advantageous aspect of the present invention, the boot system image of the firmware code stored in the volatile memory device may not be modified and may be used to restore the optical disk product from a system failure caused by a corrupted application ware.

[0010] It is to be understood that both the forgoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive of the invention as claimed. The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate an embodiment of the invention and together with the general description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] The numerous advantages of the present invention may be better understood by those skilled in the art by reference to the accompanying figures in which:

[0012] FIG. 1 is a flowchart showing an exemplary method for upgrading the firmware of an optical disk product in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention;

[0013] FIG. 2 is a flowchart showing an exemplary method for restoring the optical disk product in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention;

[0014] FIG. 3 is a schematic block diagram illustrating an exemplary optical disk product in accordance with the present invention;

[0015] FIG 4 is a schematic block diagram illustrating an exemplary DVD product in accordance with the present invention, wherein the DVD product starts performing an upgrading process;

[0016] FIG. 5 is a schematic block diagram illustrating an exemplary DVD product subsequently to the schematic block diagram shown in FIG. 4, wherein the DVD product performs an erasing operation;

[0017] FIG. 6 is a schematic block diagram illustrating an exemplary DVD product subsequently to the schematic block diagram shown in FIG. 5, wherein the DVD product performs a writing operation;

[0018] FIG. 7 is a schematic block diagram illustrating an exemplary DVD product subsequently to the schematic block diagram shown in FIG. 5 wherein the DVD product performs a restoring operation; and

[0019] FIG. 8 is a schematic block diagram illustrating the state of an exemplary DVD product subsequently to the schematic block diagram the shown in FIG. 7.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] Reference will now be made in detail to the presently preferred embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings.

[0021] Referring generally now to FIGS. 1 through 2, exemplary embodiments of the present invention are discussed, wherein a safe method for upgrading firmware of optical disk products is employed. The method of the present invention allows a manufacture to provide a new application ware for the firmware of optical disk product to end users without facing a risk of corruption of the firmware.

[0022] Referring to FIG. 1, a flow chart of an exemplary process 100 used for upgrading the firmware in accordance with the present invention is shown. An end user may start executing an upgraded application program stored in a recording medium such as an optical disk, a hard drive of the host computer or the like. Execution of the upgraded application program may be implemented by insertion of the optical disk into an optical disk drive. Then, an upgrading the firmware command (rewriting command) may be supplied to an interface circuit as a series of signals (inputs) coming from a recording medium (a source external to the optical disk drive). The process 100 may start with the step in which an interface circuit receives signals 105 from a source external to the optical disk drive. An example of an interface circuit may be an Attachment Packet Interface (ATAPI) circuit. According to this arrangement, it is possible to easily use a new interface such as enhanced Integrated Drive Electronics (IDE) while inheriting the past accumulated software property for optical disk drives which conform to the Small Computer System Interface (SCSI) interface specifications or the like. If an optical disk drive is to be mounted as standard equipment in a computer such as a personal computer which includes, for example, a Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) bus as the bus and an IDE interface controller as the interface controller, the ATAPI interface circuit can be adopted as the interface circuit of the optical disk drive. In almost all cases, if the optical disk drive is to be mounted as standard equipment in the computer, a main board and the optical disk drive are incorporated in one case.

[0023] The received signals by the interface circuit are decoded to be determined whether an upgrading the firmware code operation command (a rewriting command) has been requested 110. A firmware program is a software driver of an optical disk product.

Examples of a firmware program may include a DVD-Recordable (DVD-R) driver, DVD-Audio (DVD-A) driver, DVD+Read Write (DVD+RW) driver, CD-ROM driver and the like. A firmware program may be stored in non-volatile semiconductor memory devices, such as EEPROM, a Flash memory and the like. Based on the firmware program code, a optical disk product may perform its desirable functionality, such as playing music CD, Video CD (VCD), or DVD, reading data from CD-ROM, DVD-R, or DVD+RW, or writing data to CD-ROM or DVD+RW. A firmware program code may be upgraded by an execution of an application program. Under certain circumstances, upgrading of a firmware code may not be avoidable. For example, if an optical disk product has been sold with program problems (program bugs) that might cause the product to malfunction, the manufacturer of the optical disk product may be responsible for the problem. Upon program bugs, the firmware code may have to be upgraded, namely, replaced by another copy without the problem. Further, upgrading of firmware code may be preferable when a product may be enhanced by installment of new firmware code.

[0024] In the present invention, to provide reliable upgrading process, the nonvolatile memory may have a first portion which stores a boot system image (a first program) and a second portion which stores an application ware image (a second program). The first portion of the nonvolatile memory is an area which stores a boot system ware which allows the controller to execute processing for restoring the optical disk product. The first portion may be determined virtually by the size of the boot system image and the nonvolatile memory device sector alignment. The rest of available nonvolatile memory area (other than the first portion) is the second portion of the nonvolatile memory. The second portion stores an application ware image to be executed by the controller for the operation of the disk. An example of application program may be an access control program. The access control program may perform control such as speed control of a disk and signal processing according to the speed of reproduction of recorded information.

[0025] Next, the process 100 may load an upgraded application program (supplied to interface circuit from outside of the optical disk device) to a volatile memory device 115.

An example of a volatile memory device may be a Dynamic Random Access Memory (DRAM). The upgraded application program may be supplied to interface circuit from a source external to the device. An example of a source external to the optical disk product may be a Digital Versatile Disk (DVD). Another example of a source external to the optical disk product may include a CD-ROM disk, a hard disk of host computer, or the like. Further, the upgraded application program may be supplied from a manufacturer to an end user through communications means such as the Internet. Accordingly, it is possible to instantaneously send the upgraded application program to the computer maker, the company which sells the computer, or the end user of the computer.

[0026] A controller may start an upgrading process by erasing the application ware image stored in the second portion of the nonvolatile memory 120. In the present invention, only the second portion of the firmware may be erased. Accordingly, only the application ware image may be erased 120 upon the upgrading process since the second portion stores the application ware image. The first portion of the firmware may not be allowed to be erased or rewritten. Therefore, the boot system ware stored in the first portion may not be modified upon the upgrading process, even if an abnormality may have occurred during the upgrading process, the boot system ware may be used to restore the optical disk product back before the abnormality may have occurred. An example of an abnormality may be a power failure during upgrading process. Upon a power failure, any program including the application program of the optical disk product loaded into DRAM may be disappeared. Additionally, the application ware image stored in the nonvolatile memory may also be deleted in whole or in part as a result of the upgrading process. This casualty (no application ware or half deleted application ware) may render the optical disk product inoperable. Another example of an abnormality may include an invalid upgraded application program, a disk read error and the like. After the step 120, the original application ware may be still loaded in the volatile memory device to allow the controller to execute the upgrading process. Then, the controller may rewrite the second portion of the nonvolatile memory in accordance with the upgraded application program (the upgraded second program) loaded in the volatile memory 125.

[0027] Referring now to FIG. 2, a flow chart of an exemplary process 200 used for restoring the optical disk product in accordance with the present invention is shown. Referring back to FIG. 1, the process 100 may be terminated by unexpected events before the upgraded application program was successfully rewritten into the nonvolatile memory device 125. An example of the unexpected events may be a power failure. In the event of a power failure, the volatile memory may lose all of its contents including the boot system code, the application program and the upgraded application program, while the application ware image stored in the nonvolatile memory device may have been erased in whole or in part 120. When an unexpected event may happen, an end user may send a restoring command to the optical disk product as directed by the manufacturer who provides the upgrading application program. For example, a user can press a reset button of the front panel of the optical disk product to activate the restoring. Then, the restoring command may be supplied to an interface circuit as a series of signals (inputs).

[0028] The process 200 may start with the step in which an interface circuit receives signals 205. The received signals may be decoded to be determined whether a boot disk mode operation (a restore command) has received 210. Upon reception of a restore command, the controller may load a boot system ware stored in the first portion of a nonvolatile memory to a volatile memory device 215. The boot system ware may include program code that allow the controller to copy or decompress the application ware to the volatile memory device from the second portion of the nonvolatile memory device or from a source external of the optical disk product. Additionally, the boot system ware may include an interface circuit driver and a disk file system. Further, the controller may execute the boot system code to initialize an interface circuit and to run a disk file system 220 to allow a controller to load a valid application program (a valid second program) from outside of the optical disk product. The valid application program may be provided to the volatile memory device from a source external of the optical disk product 240. Before loading the valid application program, the controller may check whether a valid application program is provided to restore the optical disk product 235. If the valid application

program is provided, the valid application program may be loaded to volatile memory device, and then the optical disk product may be restored and ready for the upgrading process 240. If the valid application program is not provided yet, the process may return to step 230 and may wait for the valid second program 230.

[0029] Referring to FIG. 3, a schematic block diagram of an exemplary embodiment 300 of the present invention is shown. A optical disk product 300 may include an optical disk drive such as DVD drive, CD-ROM drive and the like comprising a electrically erasable and writable nonvolatile memory device 305 for storing a firmware code with a boot system image (a first program) and an application ware image (a second program), a volatile memory device 310 for loading an application ware, and a controller for executing the firmware code to control a content access operation of the optical disk drive, an interface circuit device 315 for I/O interface. One of the examples of the electrically erasable and writable nonvolatile memory device 305 may be a Flash memory. A Flash memory is a type of nonvolatile memory device where erasing can only be done in memory blocks or the entire chip. Thus, upgrading a Flash memory may be done faster than upgrading regular EEPROM. The non-volatile memory device 305 stores a boot system image in a first portion 306 and an application ware image in a second portion 307. Further, the boot system ware and the application ware may be compressed separately and stored in the first portion 306 and the second portion 307 of the nonvolatile memory device respectively when a manufacturer wants to utilize the nonvolatile memory space.

[0030] FIGS. 4 to 6 sequentially show the operation of rewriting the application program according to an embodiment of the present invention wherein a DVD product is employed as an example of a particular embodiment of the present invention.

[0031] As shown in FIG. 4, A DVD product 400 may comprise a Flash memory device 405 for storing a firmware code with a first portion (storing a first program) 406 and a second portion (storing a second program) 407, Dynamic Random Access Memory (DRAM) 410 a control process unit (CPU) 415, and an ATAPI circuit device 435 for I/O

interface. Initially the Flash memory device 405 may store the firmware code of the DVD product 400 and the firmware code may be loaded (copied and decompressed) to DRAM 410 to allow the CPU 415 to operate the DVD product 400. A rewriting command for the firmware code may be supplied to an ATAPI circuit 435 from an optical disk. An example of the optical disk may be a DVD-R 425. An end user may insert an upgrading DVD-R 425 into the DVD product 400 to activate the rewriting command. The DVD-R 425 which stores an upgraded application program along with a rewriting command for the DVD product 400 may be provided by a manufacturer of the DVD product 400. The ATAPI circuit 435 may recognize the rewriting command, and supply the rewriting command to the controller 415.

[0032] Subsequently, as shown in FIG 5, the updated application program via the ATAPI circuit 535 may be loaded to DRAM 510. The CPU 515 may execute the input control program which is a part of the application program. Thus, the CPU 515 may load the upgraded application program 511 supplied to the ATAPI circuit 535 from DVD-R 525, into the DRAM 510. The CPU 515 may erase the second portion 507 of the Flash memory 505 after loading the upgraded application ware to DRAM 510. Then, as shown in FIG 6, the controller 615 may rewrite the Flash memory 605 with the upgraded application program. After successful upgrading operation, the first portion 605 of the Flash memory 605 may store the unchanged boot system ware image, and the second portion 607 of the Flash memory 605 may store the new upgraded application ware.

[0033]

[0034] FIGS. 7 to 8 sequentially show the operation of restoring an embodiment of the present invention wherein a DVD product is employed as an example of a particular embodiment of the present invention.

[0035]

[0036] FIG 7 illustrates a block diagram of a DVD product upon reception of a restoring command when an unexpected event may terminate the rewriting operation. An example of activating a restoring command may be a key press by an end user. In the event of casualty during upgrading process, a user may press the open/close tray key on the front

panel of a DVD product 700 as directed by the manufacturer who may provide a boot disk 725 that stores an upgraded application program and a valid application program ware. The CPU 715 may load the boot system code 711 to DRAM 710 upon reception of a restoring command. Referring back to FIG 5, only the second portion 507 of the Flash memory 505 may be erased during upgrading process and the first portion 506 of the Flash memory 505 may be unchanged. Accordingly, the boot system ware image may be remained in the first portion 506 of Flash memory 505 even if an abnormality may have happened. The CPU 715 may initialize the ATAPI circuit 735 by executing the boot system code in the DRAM 710. Thus, the link between the ATAPI circuit 735 and the DRAM 710 may be restored. The CPU 715 may also execute a DVD file system program that is a part of the boot system code in the DRAM 710. Subsequently, the ATAPI circuit 735 may be able to fetch data from DVD-R. Referring now to FIG 8, the CPU 815 may load a valid application program 812 to DRAM 810 though ATAPI 835 circuit from DVD-R (boot disk) 825. For example, the DVD-R 825 may store the valid application program and the upgraded application program if the manufacturer prefers to do. With the valid application program loaded to the DRAM 810, the DVD product 800 may be restored and ready to be upgraded.

[0037] Although the invention has been described with a certain degree of particularity, it should be recognized that elements thereof may be altered by persons skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. It is believed that the method for the present invention and many of its attendant advantages will be understood by the foregoing description, and it will be apparent that various changes may be made in the form, construction, and arrangement of the components thereof without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention or without sacrificing all of its material advantages, the form herein before described being merely an explanatory embodiment thereof. It is the intention of the following claims to encompass and include such changes.